

THE JACOBS REPORT

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For Immediate Release
February 4, 2005

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GRANHOLM & JACOBS: EARLY CHILDHOOD ED A RISING FOCUS

The Granholm Administration is readying an aggressive early childhood development strategy that focuses on rewarding and recognizing the state's best community programs and creating a central clearinghouse parents can use to find the best places to send their young children.

Through the groundwork already done by the Child Action Network and the governor's Children's Cabinet, DHS Director Marianne Udow said this week that the state is examining a licensure process that would reward the best-performing pre-school programs by creating a tiered-rating system so parents know how one program stacks up against another. The focal point is to give parents a standard from which they can choose quality.

The Department of Human Services is working with the Department of Community Health and other groups in a public-private partnership to create a one-stop shop arrangement where parents can find pre-schools, licensed daycares and parenting classes. The vision is to build on community models.

Given the state's tight budget, Udow said she's not looking to squeeze any more money out of the state budget. The state is approaching foundations such as the Ready to Succeed Partnership. These initiatives come as part of the progress the state has already made in this area.

"This is a great place to start," said Senator Gilda Z. Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods). Senator Jacobs' cousin, Art Rolnick, is Senior Vice President and Director of Research for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. He is also one of America's most articulate advocates of early childhood education. "The best investment for state and local governments is in developing our communities' human capital, which is our workforce," Jacobs added.

Udow concurred. "The biggest change in the state is that you have many of the intermediate school districts that talk about 'birth through 12' because they understand how important it is for kids coming to school ready to succeed," she said. "The Ready to Succeed Partnership is a big success. It brings a lot of people to the table to talk about that issue and that's important."

"Children learn more from birth to age three than any other time in life," Governor Granholm said in a recent release. "During these years, what we do will affect the way they learn, think and behave forever. As parents, child care providers and concerned citizens, it is our job to

ensure that our youngest and most vulnerable residents are prepared and ready to enter the classroom.”

For a complete copy of the Final Report of the NGA Task Force on School Readiness and for the companion Governor's Guide to School Readiness by the NGA Center for Best Practices, log on to the NGA Web site at www.nga.org. The bipartisan NGA Task Force was co-chaired by former Kentucky Gov. Paul PATTON and Idaho Gov. Dirk KEMPTHORNE and also included the governors of Arkansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and a former governor of Missouri.

SENATOR BISHOP PLANNING INSURANCE WORKGROUP

Under intense scrutiny from Senate Democrats, Sen. Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) announced this week that he will be conducting a workgroup to explore insurance issues. Bishop is the chair of the Senate Banking and Financial Institutions Committee.

In addition to the issues of credit scoring and Governor Jennifer Granholm's proposal to amend the Single Business Tax, Senator Bishop said he is also expecting the workgroup to take a general look at rates and how those rates compare in territories across the state.

Pete Kuhnmuensch, executive director of the Insurance Institute of Michigan, told the committee that any new rules could mean rate increases for most insurance buyers.

Democrats on the committee argued that Michigan-based insurers have seen lower tax rates than their counterparts around the country for many years.

Detroit delegation members said any proposal that would provide relief to insurance companies would have to include a component justifying rates charged in that and other urban areas in the state, or some plan to bring those rates into line with other regions of the state. They said premiums should be based on the loss rates for individuals, not for the communities in which they live.

Senator Bishop said he expected the workgroup to pull together information that would at least justify urban rates.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS, INDUSTRY LAUD NEW AIR PERMITS

James Clift of the Michigan Environmental Council joined industry representatives this week in praising the Department of Environmental Quality's efforts to cut the time it takes to issue air permits.

The recently implemented program not only speeds up the permit process, it also encourages plants to further cut emissions.

Steve Tomaszewski, air quality manager for General Motors Corporation was especially pleased with DEQ when it issued a permit for expansion of the automaker's Flint Engine Plant in 22

days. Under past administrations, the process was generally expected to take as long as nine months.

Environmental Quality Director Steven Chester said that the new permit process, unveiled in September 2004, has reduced the average permit issue time to 37 days. Companies that meet with the department before applying have reduced review times to an average 20 days.

Mike Johnston, director of regulatory affairs for the Michigan Manufacturers Association, said the idea of permit-scoping meetings was the key to improving the process. "It was born of a DEQ employee, and I think that's significant," he said.

Environmental groups support the process because it encourages companies to put in the best available controls. "It really does encourage companies to push the envelope and reduce emissions because then you can get a permit even faster," Mr. Clift said, adding that the new system encourages the companies to seek community input before applying for the permit rather than having community members react to the permit afterward.

Mr. Chester said the department was exploring similar processes for other permits, but he said the process may not be appropriate for all types of permits.

BANKING, CREDIT TOPPED CONSUMER COMPLAINTS IN '04

As released by the Attorney General's office this week, the 10 most common Michigan complaints in order of frequency, in order, were:

1. Banking and credit concerns, including identity theft complaints and credit report disputes.
2. Telecommunications and cable or satellite TV complaints, including identity theft complaints and unauthorized charges.
3. Internet concerns including Internet purchases, spamming and money transfers.
4. Retail problems including billing disputes and merchandise quality.
5. Vehicle problems including the lemon law and misrepresentation complaints.
6. Mail order complaints.
7. Contractor problems.
8. Gasoline, fuel and energy price and rate complaints.
9. Small business service provider complaints, including unauthorized services, unsolicited faxes, and leases for business equipment that cannot be cancelled.
10. Travel complaints including failure to refund and misrepresentations.

All Michigan legislation can be tracked at <http://www.legislature.michigan.gov/> .

State Senator Gilda Jacobs represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Franklin, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak Township, Southfield, and Southfield Township. She is the Minority Vice Chair of the Families & Human Services Committee and the Economic Development, Small Business & Regulatory Reform Committee. She also serves on the Government Operations and Health Policy Committees.

Constituents of the 14th District may contact Senator Jacobs at sengjacobs@senate.michigan.gov or toll-free at 1-888-937-4453.

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